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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000531

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SUBJECT: Niger: UN-AU-ECOWAS Delegation Meets GON Officials,
Political Parties, and Civil Society

Ref: a) Niamey 00375, b) Niamey 00344, c) Niamey 00211

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11. Summary: On July 20-21, a joint UN-AU-ECOWAS delegation met with President Tandja, PM Oumarou, political party leaders, civil society, and labor union heads in an attempt to defuse the ongoing political crisis. All meetings took place behind closed doors; President Tandja subsequently declared on state media that the referendum would still be held, and declared that he acted in response to the needs of the Nigerien people, not of the international community. The delegation also met with a few members of the diplomatic corps to discuss the political environment. End summary.

Envoys Meet Prime Minister Oumarou

12. On July 20, the delegation, made up of United Nations (UN) Secretary General's Special Envoy for West Africa Said Djinnit, African Union (AU) Special Representative for Cote d'Ivoire Ambroise Niyonsaba, and Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission President Mohammed Ibn Chambas, met with Prime Minister Oumarou. Foreign Minister Mindaoudou and Minister of Professional and Technical Training Mamadou (former Minister of Justice and an author of the new constitution draft) also were present. Official sources in Niamey indicated, without further detail, that discussions related to "the political situation prevailing in Niger."

Meetings: Political Parties, Civil Society and Unions

13. On July 20, the envoys met with representatives of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Republic (AFDR), made up of parties of the ruling coalition, and civil society organizations supporting President Tandja - namely the Citizens' Movement for Peace, Democracy and the Republic (MCPDR). Nouhou Arzika, leader of the MCPDR, stated on private radio that they gave their interlocutors a historical background of Niger's political situation during the past 20 years and analyzed the behavior of political leaders during that period. Regarding the August 4 referendum, Arzika told envoys that "It is the will of the sovereign people. The people should be the beginning and the end of all actions. There is no crisis, unlike what you seem to believe. There is just a conflict of interest due to some politicians moved only by the desire to serve their personal interests."

14. Bazoum Mohamed, vice president of the PNDS, the main opposition party, told journalists that opposition parties "had clearly explained to the delegation their position, that is, Tandja must repeal his decision to hold a referendum, even if it means to open

dialogue with him." Responding to another question by foreign media about the results of the meeting with international envoys, he said, "We do not know what emerged from Mr. Tandja's meeting with the tripartite delegation, but we know one thing - he is stubborn and will not listen to them. We are getting organized in order to block the referendum."

15. The delegation also met with labor unions, with no details yet available. Abdou Maigandi, the leader of the Trade Union of Nigerien Workers (USTN) told the press that unions had explained their position to the delegation, and made the following comment: "We wish good luck to these envoys as they face leaders who do not share the virtues of democracy. Tandja has returned to his military past, so he will not back down. It looks like the delegation arrived too late."

President Tandja Receives the Delegation

16. On July 21, envoys met with President Tandja in the presence of Foreign Minister Mindaoudou and Minister of Professional and Technical Training Mamadou. ECOWAS Commission President Ibn Chambas, however, indicated to government media that the purpose of the delegation's trip was to explore how their respective institutions could play a role in order to "ensure the continuity of dialogue among Nigeriens, to restore consensus, which was a mechanism for managing political affairs that greatly helped the country...The President has indicated to us that he is always open and ready to discuss with all (political parties, civil society, and unions) in order to ensure the consolidation of democracy...Political parties have also insisted on the need to resume dialogue between political parties and other active forces of the nation in order to overcome the current situation in Niger...We have always insisted on the fact that it is up to Nigeriens to solve their problems via dialogue and through consensus."

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17. On July 20, the UN System Coordinator arranged a meeting, at the request of the delegation, with several diplomatic corps ambassadors and international institution senior representatives in order to gain their perspective on the political environment as representatives in the host country. There was consensus that President Tandja is unlikely to cancel the August 4 referendum.

"I Respond to Nigeriens, not Internationals"

18. On July 21, President Tandja spoke on state media regarding the delegation's visit and declared that he responded to the people of Niger, not the international community. He further affirmed that the referendum would continue on schedule; if the people rejected his plan for a new constitution, they could vote "no."

President Tandja Hosts West African Journalists

19. While Ibn Chambas reaffirmed "the deep concerns of the international community and ECOWAS" about the situation in Niger, President Tandja commissioned several West African journalists to travel throughout Niger to see and report on his "great work." In a press conference on July 20, he told them that "the people have come to me and asked me to stay for three years in order to complete what I undertook...I told them that we have to change the Constitution, because the current one does not allow it...the people have opted that we go to the referendum...The president is required to call the referendum."

Comment

10. Since the beginning of the year, President Tandja has had several meetings with UN, AU, and ECOWAS officials. For example, on March 13, President Tandja assured UN envoy Said Djinnit that he would organize elections within the legal timeframe (ref C). The same day, Foreign Minister Mindaoudou convoked foreign diplomats to explain President Tandja's referendum plans (ref B). On May 15, the ECOWAS Council of the Wise urged President Tandja not to seek an extension of his term of office (ref A), but to no avail. End comment.

